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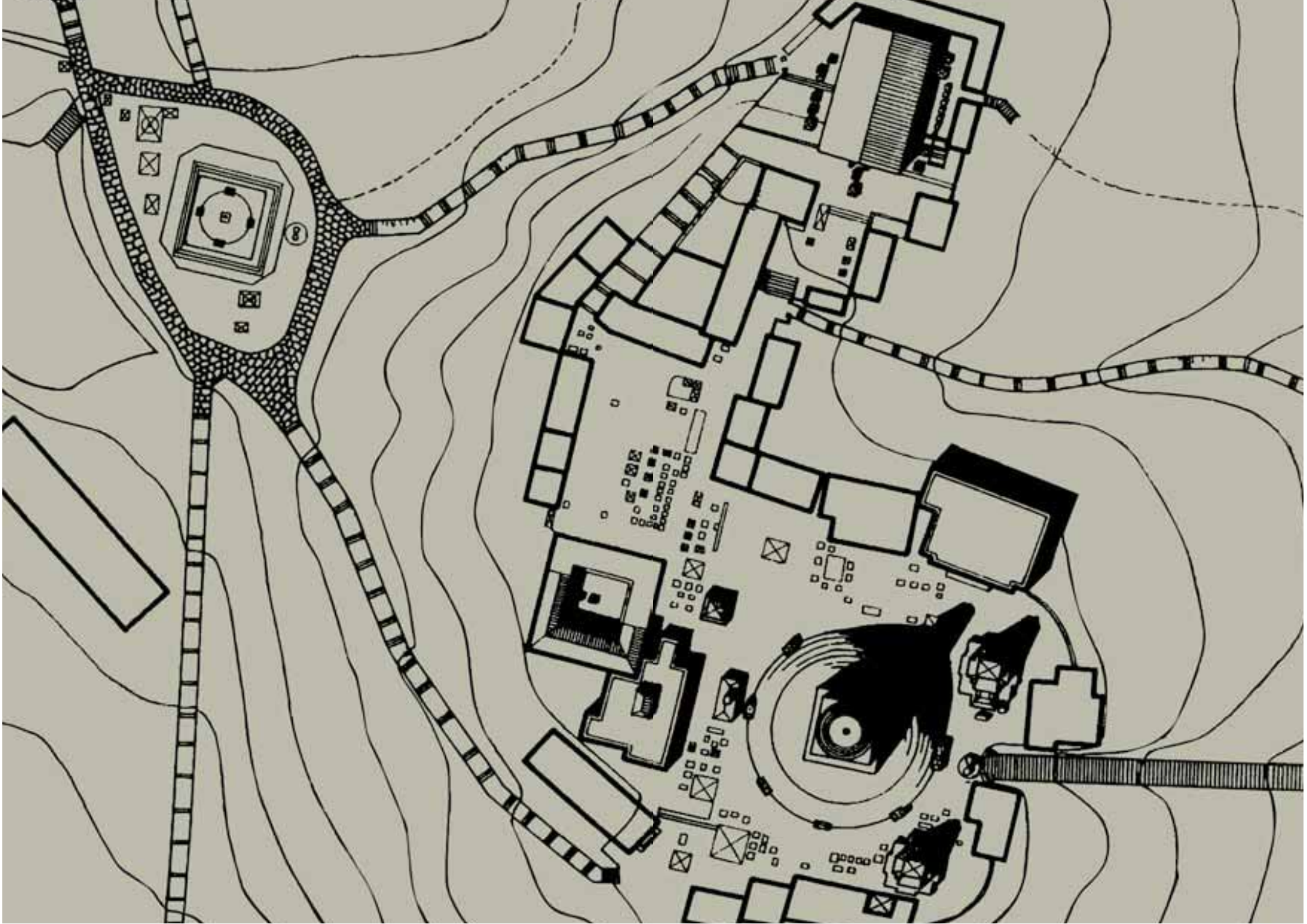
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## Swayambhu

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HANUMAN DHOKA DURBAR SQUARE



PATAN DURBAR SQUARE



BHAKTAPUR DURBAR SQUARE



BAUDDHANATH



SWAYAMBHU



PASHUPATI



CHANGU NARAYAN

## CULTURAL PORTRAIT HANDBOOKS

Heritage and culture can be discovered and enjoyed throughout the Kathmandu Valley. Seven monument zones in particular were recognised to be of outstanding universal value by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and have therefore been added to the List of World Heritage Sites (WHL).

The WHL includes cultural and natural heritage sites from all over the world, and the World Heritage Convention provides a legal tool for their protection. Of the 812 World Heritage Sites, four are located in Nepal, namely the Kathmandu Valley, Sagarmatha National Park, Royal Chitwan National Park and Lumbini, the birthplace of Lord Buddha.

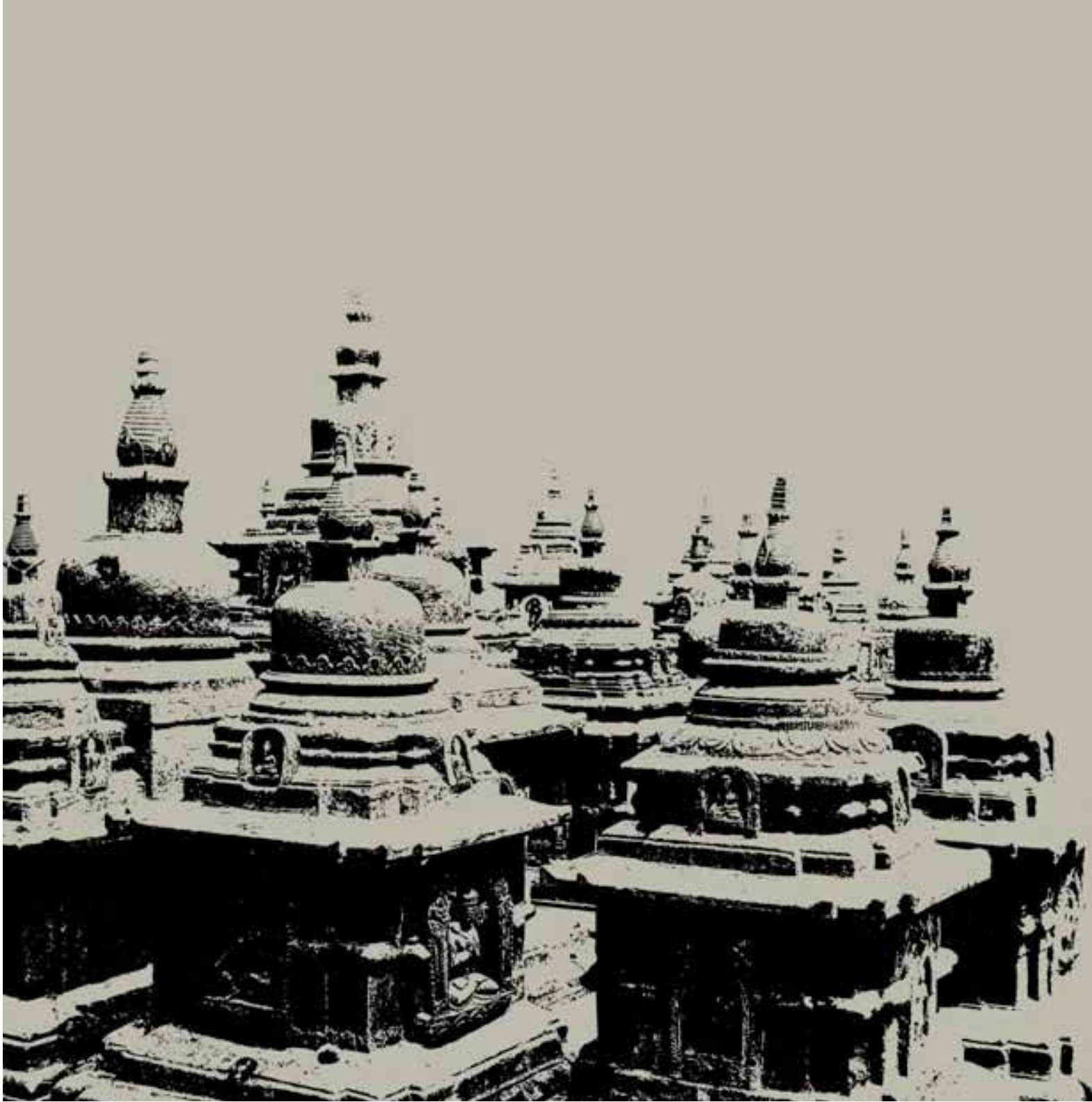
The diverse monument zones of the Kathmandu Valley embody the uniquely intricate and yet refined Newari urban buildings and an incredible mix of Hindu and Buddhist culture. The Valley provides an example of mixed architectural styles and exquisite craftsmanship. Its very composition makes it one of the most complex World Heritage Sites on the WHL: not only does it

include the historic centers of the Valley's three main cities; it also encompasses remarkable living Hindu and Buddhist monuments.

The site was listed as a World Heritage Site in 1979 as bearing a unique testimony to a cultural tradition which is living (criteria iii) and is an outstanding example of a group of buildings that illustrate a significant stage in human history (criteria iv). The Valley is also the context for many living traditions and events, with artistic works of outstanding universal value (criteria vi).

This booklet is one of seven that were prepared as part of a wider awareness raising campaign aimed at focusing both local and international attention on the need to preserve the Kathmandu Valley WHS. Generous funding from the National Federation of UNESCO Associations in Japan (NFUAJ) has enabled the UNESCO Office in Kathmandu to prepare these publications highlighting the gems of the Valley and their rich mythological and historical background.





**T**he Swayambhu Stupa is as engulfed in legends as it is by advancing mist in winter; Sweeping around corners, climbing over the trees, swirling over the gravel paths and up the hill called Gopuccha. They say that the eternal flame can never be extinguished; they say that a great sage still lives inside the Shantipur having achieved immortality and that the lotus with the thousand petals still exists. The stupa or chaitya in Sanskrit, and chorten in Tibetan is not only one of the most venerated Buddhist sites in Nepal and of the most sacred in Kathmandu, it also symbolizes the creation of the valley itself.





## LEGENDS OF SWAYAMBHU

During the Golden Age, when Gods walked alongside humans and the Kathmandu Valley was submerged under water, Vipaswi Buddha heard about the Great Lake (**Taodhanahrada**), renowned for its crystal clear water. Countless springs fed the lake and the depth gave it its second name of Kalihrada (kali means black in Nepali). When the Buddha and his disciples arrived at Taodhanahrada they were overwhelmed by its beauty. They surveyed the scene and noticed numerous species of plants and flowers but could not spot a single lotus. This saddened Vipaswi Buddha so he planted lotus seeds.







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Finally, after a wait of eighty thousand years, the lotus bloomed. It had a thousand petals and the Self-Existent Lord, the **Swayambhunath**, manifested himself in the form of an Eternal Flame, the Jyotirupa.

Some time later, Bodhisattva **Manjushri** was deep in meditation when he became aware of the lake with the lotus and eternal flame. He was so intrigued that he immediately left the holy mountain Panchasira Parvata and undertook the journey to Taodhanahrada. He was accompanied by his wives and his flaming sword, Chandra Hasa (Dreadful Laugh).

Manjushri walked around the lakeshore and it pleased him greatly to experience such surpassing beauty.

However, he felt that if the water was drained from the lake it would be more accessible for the large numbers of pilgrims who visited the remarkable holy site. Manjushri meditated on this idea and eventually decided to act: in a single dexterous movement he brought the flaming sword down on the mountainside, slicing through it and releasing the water to the south. It gushed out of the lake and the scar can still be seen 8 kilometers south of the Kathmandu Ring Road at the Chobar Gorge.

Years later **Shantikar Acharya**, who had come to Nepal on pilgrimage, grew concerned about the eternal flame. He felt that it might become difficult to preserve the light in the future, and requested guidance from Manjushri.

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## Naga

The Naga are snake-like beings first depicted in Vedic Hindu mythology. Stories involving the supernatural beings are still very much a part of contemporary cultural traditions in Hindu and Buddhist regions of Asia. In Nepal the Naga are an intricate part of myth and legend, worthy of veneration and recognised as the symbol of water and rainfall, and thus fertility and strength. When they begin to leave an area it is a biological indicator that there is a water shortage, thus a proliferation of snakes is viewed as positive in the Kathmandu Valley.

The mythological link between the serpents and the Valley dates back to the time when it was still a lake. After Manjushri sliced through the mountainside to drain the water, the serpents that had been living there were greatly disturbed. Some fled to distant lands, some slithered away to explore the depths of the ocean and others abandoned the lake, never to return. However, the Serpent-King Karkotaka, and a few others remained in Nepal, unable to abandon the Kingdom.





#### List of serpents and their attributes mentioned in the Swayambhu Purana:

1. Sagara Nagaraja - Naga of the ocean
2. Vidyumati Nagaraja- Naga of lightning flash
3. Avabhashnasikkhi Nagaraja- Naga with luminous fluid
4. Jambudhaja Nagaraja- Naga-like flag made of cloud
5. Swastika Nagaraja- Naga of good welfare
6. Sasateja Nagaraja- Naga with hypnotizing light
7. Meghasambhava Nagaraja- Naga of storm bearing cloud
8. Varsadhara Nagaraja- Naga bearing torrential rain
9. Mahakanaka Nagaraja- Naga who is the keeper of the treasure room
10. Amrita Nagaraja- Naga of amrita (elixir of life)
11. Amoghadarsana Nagaraja- naga of good luck
12. Mahameghambudha Nagaraja- Naga who has the knowledge of storm bearing clouds
13. Indraprabha Nagaraja- Naga like a rainbow
14. Himvavan Nagaraja- Naga of Himalaya
15. Meghasaktida Nagaraja- Naga having power to make rain
16. Ambuda Nagaraja- Naga of dharas (water spouts)
17. Vaiswarateja Nagaraja- Naga having lustre of fire inside
18. Vigatarosa Nagaraja- Naga of gentle rain
19. Sugghosa Nagaraja- Naga with pleasant sound (like a bubbling brook)
20. Amrita Sagara Nagaraja- Naga of ocean of elixir
21. Mahapravarsaka Nagaraja- The great rain maker
22. Dundubiswara Nagaraja- Naga with the sound of drum
23. Mahavidyutprabho Nagaraja- Naga of great lightning flash
24. Chudamanidhara Nagaraja- Naga of the water spout of jewels
25. Somadarsana Nagaraja- Naga, light like moonlight
26. Mahameghavikurvana Nagaraja- Naga, who is the creator of great clouds
27. Alkopata Nagaraja- Naga of the comet (comet is related to fertility)
28. Ukalagarjita Nagaraja- Naga of untimely rain
29. Akarsaka Nagaraja- Naga that attracts (hypnotizes)
30. Nimindhara Nagaraja- Naga in the form of a turtle, carrier of the earth
31. Narayana Nagaraja- Naga, who is floating on water (Cesa Naga)

Manjushri appeared before him and instructed Shantikar Acharya to build a chaitya over the flame to protect it, hence the stupa of Swayambhu was erected. The tantric mystic Shantikar Acharya is not only said to have built the chaitya, he is also credited with the foundation of the five shrines around the periphery of the stupa (their foundation date is unknown).

When Shantikar Acharya first reached the Himalayan Kingdom he found it in a state of turmoil. King Gunakamadeva had abandoned his duties and was more interested in revelry than in ruling his people. This state of affairs greatly displeased the Gods who had been watching from the heavens. They decided that the king should be

punished and in order to make him suffer they withheld the rains.

As time went by the water resources dried up and the population grew deeply concerned. The king needed help and gathered all the wise men in the valley to attempt to solve the problem and find a way to bring the fertile rains back to his country.

It was to no avail. Eventually, when all alternatives were exhausted, the king visited Swayambhu to offer his prayers. When he reached the stupa he learnt about the great sage Shantikar, who had been meditating nearby. The people revealed that this wise man had magical powers and they advised the king to ask him for help.





The sage listened to King Gunakamadeva and promised to make preparations for the only option open to them: a **Naga Sadhana**, an ancient vedic ritual or yagya with participation of the Nagarajas (snake-kings).

The success of the sadhana was dependent on the co-operation of all the Nagarajas of the valley. Each yagya has a specific intended result and has a much greater effect when performed by large groups. Therefore, all Nagarajas were requested to attend. Most were sympathetic and promptly joined Shantikar Acharya in his preparations.

However **Karkotaka**, the chief of the Nagarajas, refused to join the ritual. This act of defiance had grave implications for the success of

the venture as the mandala, which was needed for the Sadhana, could not be drawn in his absence. King Gunakamadeva went to Karkotaka's palace several times to request his presence, but the Snake-King refused. Finally, Shantikar Acharya advised King Gunakamadeva to bring him by force and together they dragged the disobedient snake to the location of the Naga Sadhana.

After they were assembled, Shantikar Acharya meticulously painted the mandala. However, even after it had been drawn with so much care, the mandala failed to bring the rains. Shantikar Acharya was perplexed and turned again to the Nagarajas for help. It was only then that they revealed a secret. The mandala had to be painted

with the blood of the Snake-Kings. With the approval of the donors, the ritual was repeated. After the recitation of several hundred mantras and complex rituals, the skies darkened and rain came crashing down upon the valley.

Karkotaka's rain-making capabilities are further illustrated in a second legend. When King Gunakamadeva predicted that a drought would destroy his kingdom and cause his empire-building efforts to go to waste, he sought the advice of Shantikar Acharya. The great sage recommended that the king should gratify the King of Serpents, the ultimate rainmaker. King Gunakamadeva was instructed to dig a well deep enough to reach the nether worlds, where Karkotaka lived. Many men were gathered and assigned the arduous task of digging to the portals of the nether world, which took twelve years.

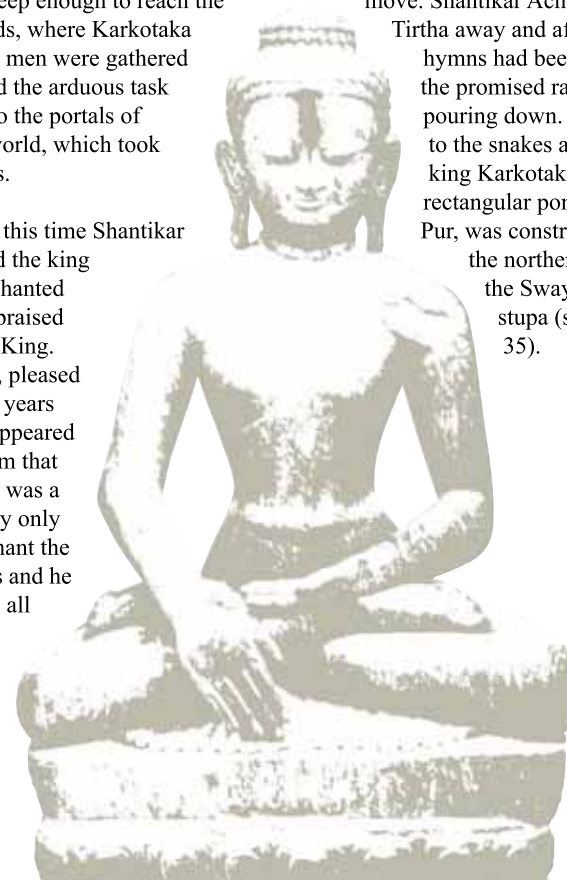
Throughout this time Shantikar Acharya and the king repeatedly chanted hymns and praised the Serpent-King. The serpent, pleased after twelve years of flattery, appeared and told them that if ever there was a drought, they only needed to chant the same hymns and he would bring all the rain in the world. Karkotaka slithered

away and Shantikar Acharya closed the bottom of the well with a large rock.

Years passed and, as King Gunakamadeva predicted, a drought did befall Kathmandu. The king gathered his men and emptied the well. When they reached the bottom they discovered that the rock would not budge and, once again, they had to resort to asking Shantikar Acharya for help.

The sage learnt that the problem was caused by the serpent Tirtha who was infuriated by the attention that had been showered upon Karkotaka. The jealous snake had wrapped himself around the stone, making it impossible to move. Shantikar Acharya drove

Tirtha away and after the hymns had been chanted the promised rains came pouring down. In tribute to the snakes and their king Karkotaka, the small rectangular pond or Nag Pur, was constructed on the northern side of the Swayambhu stupa (see page 35).









## DEVELOPMENT OF THE STUPA FORM

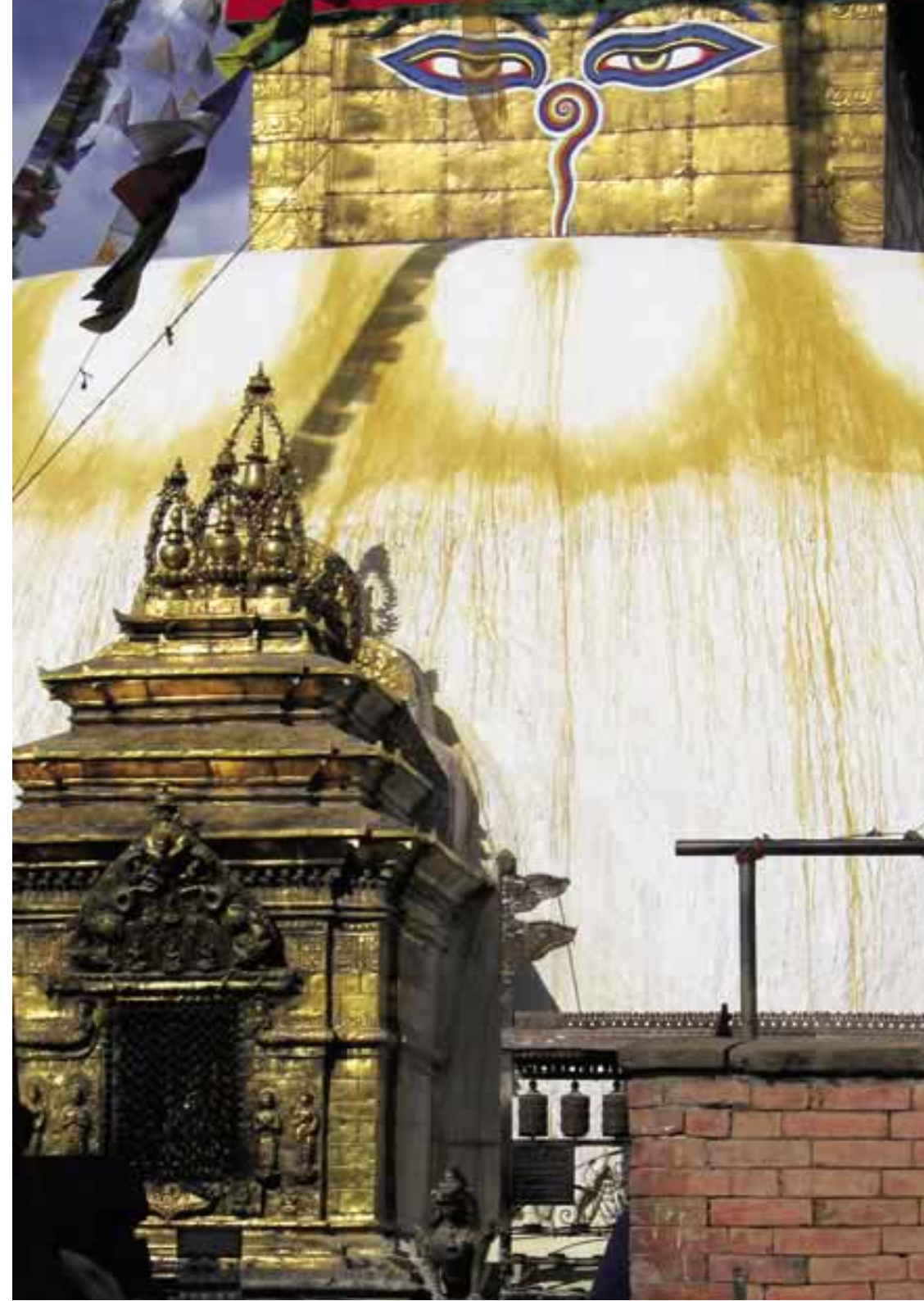
**A**mong all the religious monuments of the world, the stupa has the longest uninterrupted historical development, spanning more than three millennia. The earliest forms were burial mounds containing relics, which have been constructed from earth and rock since Neolithic times.

The link with Buddhism came after the death of the Buddha. A stupa was raised in his honor, and eight princes fought for his ashes and bones. These relics were eventually distributed to eight different kingdoms and stupas were erected over them. The stupa therefore enables the worshiper not only to think of the Buddha as a reality (by regarding its form as a visual manifestation of the Buddha), but also to contemplate enlightenment. Over time more and more meanings were added to the stupa and it is now considered to symbolize the cosmos as a whole.

Fundamentally, a stupa consists out of 5 parts. Each of these components is rich in metaphoric content and is identified with one of the five cosmic elements:

- A square or Mandala shaped base representing Earth
- A hemispherical dome symbolizing water
- A conical spire represents fire
- A canopy represents air
- The entire volume represents space.

Over history stupa architecture traveled wherever Buddhism spread, acquiring different shapes in different countries, all modelled after the Indian prototype. The structures, however, became mainly associated with Vajrayana or Tibetan Buddhism. The forms found in Nepal, of which the stupas of Baudhanath and Swayambhu are the most significant examples, are especially distinct because of the eyes painted on the harmikas (see page 9 and 14).











## SWAYAMBHU STUPA

The Swayambhu stupa is known locally as **Swayambhu Mahachaitya**, or the Big Chaitya of Swayambhu. It is said to have been built by Shantikar Acharya over the eternal flame, but historic documents attribute its construction to the Licchavi period (5th century). The stupa is situated on top of the Swayambhu hillock and overlooks the Kathmandu Valley.

On the eastern side of the hill, a Tibetan style gateway stands at the base of the steps leading to the stupa.

Next to the gateway a small stone juts out of the ground. It is said that the 10th Century King Gunakamadeva chained the serpent king Karkotaka (see page 10) to this stone, before dragging him up the hill to participate in the vedic ritual.







There are three large statues of Buddha in meditation a few paces away from the gateway and a mani wheel waits to be spun. There is also a wall made up of mani stones engraved with the mantra “**Om Mani Padme Hum**” (see page 51). Here starts the endless staircase up to the stupa. The debate regarding the number of steps one needs to climb to reach the top of the Swayambhu hill rages on, primarily because people rarely have the energy to count them on the way up. Some say there are three hundred; others swear that the number is far higher.

The climb to the top is lined with monuments and chaityas decorated with carvings of Buddha’s nativity. Maya can be seen symbolically holding the bodhi tree as she gives birth to Buddha.

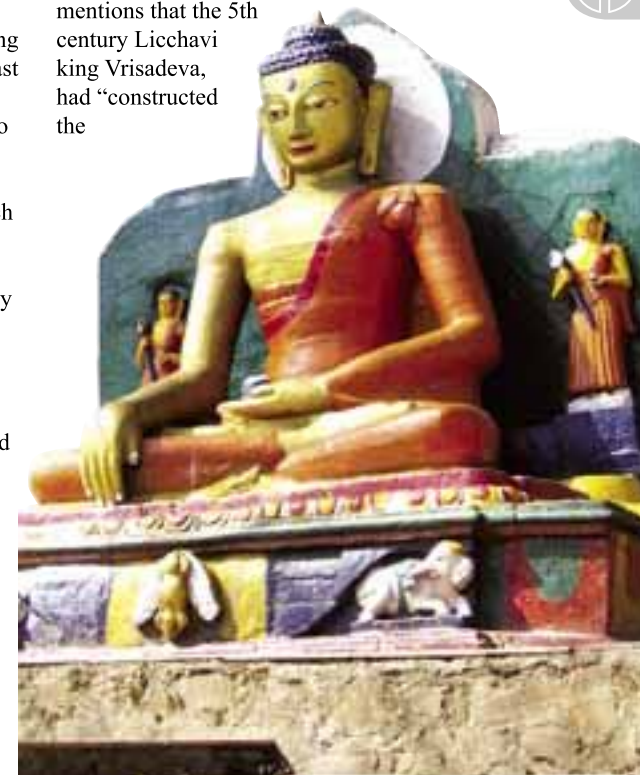
Although a lung-bursting climb, it is well worth approaching the stupa along this traditional pilgrimage route at least once, as it gives the best impression of the stupa. However, it is possible to drive to a car park at the back of the site complex and to access the stupa from a westerly direction, with a much less exhausting climb.

Vendors from different regions display everything from singing bowls to cheap plastic sunglasses on the route up the hill. Wooden masks, prayer beads, bracelets, amulets, miniature vajras (see page 32), bells, hair oil and lucky charms are displayed to attract the tourist’s attention. The steps become very steep near the summit and it is said that a person who can climb them in a single breath will attain Nirvana.

The monkeys that swarm around the hill seem to mock the unprepared visitor as they struggle to the top, and even these mischievous animals have an associated myth. Legend has it that when Manjushri cut his hair on the hill, the hair turned into trees and the lice into monkeys. So numerous are the primates living in the area that Swayambhu is also referred to as the ‘**Monkey Temple**’.

In addition to its most common name **Gopuccha**, the hill of Swayambhu is also known as **Gosring** (cow horn) or Singum because the two hills of Swayambhu and Manjushri (west of the Swayambhu hillock) are reminiscent of the horns of a cow when viewed from the Chobar Hill.

The Gopal Raj Vamsavali, a renowned early Nepalese chronicle, mentions that the 5th century Licchavi king Vrisadeva, had “constructed the









chaityabhattacharaka in Sinagum Vihara (Swayambhu)”, better known as the **Swayambhu stupa**.

Over the course of history numerous additions and renovations have been carried out to reverse the ravages of time, nature and vandalism. The muslim invasion of 1329 prompted a reconstruction in 1349, funded by King Jayasthiti and later by his son Jotir Malla. A destructive summer-storm in 1816 caused much damage to the hill of Swayambhu and was attributed by some to the arrival of the first British resident in Kathmandu. In 1977 a severe landslide on the eastern side of the hill affected the stability of the structure, but this has now been remedied.

#### Pancha Buddhas

The Pancha or Five Buddhas are very popular in Nepal and often feature above doorways of houses belonging to Buddhists. They are also a familiar site along the roadsides of Patan and Kathmandu where they are carved into stupas. Each Buddha has a designated place on the stupa: white coloured **Vairochana** belongs at the center. Blue **Akshobhya** faces east; Yellow **Ratnasambhava** faces south; Red **Amitbha** looks west and finally green **Amoghasiddhi** is oriented to the north. Each Buddha strikes an identifying pose or mudra and represents one of the cosmic elements.

**Stupas** were originally constructed as reliquaries for the bodies of prominent Buddhist figures, but have developed over time to represent more than a last resting place for mortal remains. The stupa reflects the enlightened mind of the Buddha, and all five cosmic elements are represented: the square base is the earth, the round dome symbolises water, the cone-shaped top is fire, the canopy is air and the volume of the whole is space. The colossal white washed dome of Swayambhu has at a diameter of over twenty meters and is built on a stone foundation in **mandala** shape.

At the four cardinal points of the mandala base, there are representations of the **Pancha (5) Buddhas**.

In most of the stupas in Nepal four of the Buddhas face the cardinal directions with Vairochana in the centre. However, at Swayambhu, both Vairochana and Akshobhya are located in adjacent shrines facing east and all five occupy ornate chapels around the base of the dome. Their consorts, or female counterparts, occupy the sub-cardinal points.

The dome of the stupa is surrounded by a metal enclosure containing a multitude of prayer wheels, forming a circumambulatory path.

Above the dome is the four-faced pillar or **harmika**. Eyes are painted with great precision on all four sides of the harmika. They are regarded as the eyes of the Vairochana and represent prajna and upaye, or Buddha's eyes of wisdom and compassion. The eyes are painted slightly closed and give the impression that they follow the



#### Mandala

Mandala in Sanskrit means circle. The mandalas, which are omnipresent in Buddhist culture are a fascinating concept, referring to the cyclic concept of life.

In practice, mandala has become a generic term for any plan, chart or geometric pattern which symbolically represents the cosmos. A mandala can be used during meditation as an object for focusing attention. The symmetrical geometric shapes of mandalas draw the attention of the eyes towards the center. It is a two-dimensional representation, which through correct meditation becomes three-dimensional.

A Buddhist mandala generally depicts a central deity surrounded by a number of other deities within a landscape. Mandalas consist of an outer circular mandala and an inner square (or sometimes circular) mandala with an ornately decorated mandala palace placed at the centre. It represents a 'sacred space' separated and protected from the ever-changing and impure outer world. It is thus seen as a place of Nirvana and peace.

Mandalas are often painted or sculpted in metal. Sand mandalas are patterns that are painstakingly created on the temple floor by several monks who use small bottles of coloured sand to create intricate representations from the tiny grains. The mandalas symbolize impermanence, a central teaching of Buddhism, as after the long process of creation that can take weeks, the sand is brushed into a pile and usually thrown into running water to spread the blessings of the mandala.







pilgrims walking around the stupa, are the most characteristic element in Nepal's stupa architecture.

Painted in between the eyes is a Nepali number 1, which looks like a nose. This symbol represents the monotheistic nature of the Buddhist religion.

Above the harmika are metal plates known as torana or halapu in Newari. The torana carry cast metal images of the Pancha Buddhas and the Panchakula, or the five clans of descendents.

The spire comes next, with its thirteen gilded bronze rings, and is topped with the form of a lotus surmounted with a diamond called the **Ushnish Chudamani**. These rings represent the thirteen **levels of perfection**.

#### 13 Levels of Perfection

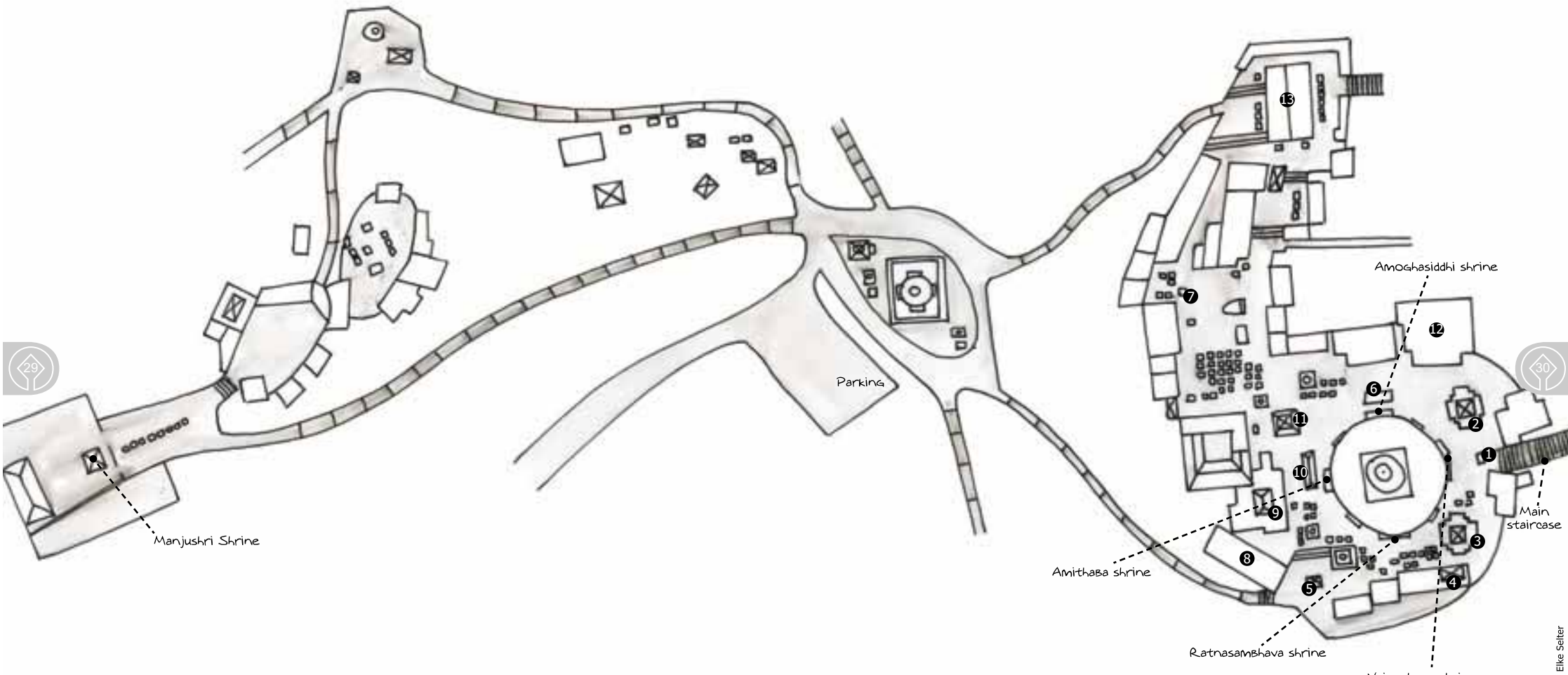
1. Ratnaparamita - Jewel
2. Daanparamita - giving
3. Shilaparamita - morality
4. Ksantiparamita - forbearance
5. Viryaparamita - vigour
6. Dhyanaaramita - meditation
7. Pragyaparamita - wisdom
8. Upayaparamita – skill in means
9. Pranidhiparamita - aspiration
10. Balaparamita - strength
11. Vajraparamita – diamond and action
12. Gyanaparamita – knowledge
13. Nirvana







# SWAYAMBHU



- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>Key</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Vajra Dhatu Mandala</li> <li>2. Pratappur</li> <li>3. Anantapur</li> <li>4. Vasupur</li> <li>5. Vayupur</li> <li>6. Nagpur</li> <li>7. Agnipur</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8. Swayambhu Museum</li> <li>9. Deva Dharma Mahavihar</li> <li>10. Peacock Shrine</li> <li>11. Harati Temple</li> <li>12. Karmaraja Mahavihar</li> <li>13. Shantipur</li> </ul> |
|--|--|



## AROUND THE STUPA

The stupa is today part of a larger complex of shrines, temples and monasteries.

At the top of the main eastern stairway stands the **Vajra Dhatu Mandala**. The massive gilt bronze vajra rests upon a copper mandala. The mandala is supported on a round stone base, which bears small sculptures of twelve animal figures, representing the twelve months of the Tibetan year: rat, bull, tiger, jackal, dragon, serpent, horse, sheep, monkey, goose, dog and the pig. The vajra was installed in the 17th century by king Pratap Malla, but the mandala underneath is older.

The vajra is considered one of the most holy objects of the Swayambhu area. It is the symbolic representation of the sword of Manjushri, the Bodhisattva

of Compassion who is believed to have drained the lake and created the Kathmandu Valley. It is also a representation of Akshobhya, the Pancha Buddha of the East, who is housed in the shrine just in front.

### Vajra

The Sanskrit word vajra means 'diamond-like'. The vajra symbol or thunderbolt represents durability, immutability and hardness. In Tibetan, the vajra is called dorje, meaning noble stone.

Symbolizing the male power, the vajra always works in close association with a bell or a Ghanta, which refers to female wisdom and receptiveness. To achieve enlightenment these two principles of male and female should work together.





Vayupur Shrine

Next to the Vajra Dhatu Mandala stands a huge bell, which is rung by pilgrims before starting their circumambulation of the stupa.

According to the tradition, the stupa is circumambulated in a clockwise direction. Circumambulation is one of the main components of buddhist pilgrimage. Generally 3, 13 or 108 tours are made around the sacred object or monument, or even following much larger circuits. In Swayambhu, other than the circuit on top of the hill encircling the stupa, there is a larger circumambulatory path or khora around the base of the hill. It is lined with prayer wheels and monasteries, as well as smaller shrines and temples

and can easily be followed from the bottom of the main staircase, turning clockwise along the hill.

Two white shikhara-style temples, recognizable by their tapering whitewashed towers, stand on either side of the eastern staircase. They are known as **Pratappur** (see page 63-66) and **Anantapur**. Pratappur is located to the right of the central Vajra Dhatu Mandala and Anantapur stands on the left side, near the Vayupur shrine. Both temples were built by King Pratap Malla, who named them after himself and his favourite queen, Anantapriya.

The king built the temples in the year 1655 when he was receiving a tantric education from the gurus of Swayambhu. The shikharas are dedicated to mysterious Vajrayana deities. For most of

the year the temples are ignored by the worshippers and a priest occasionally enters Anantapur to perform pujas in order to appease the deities.

The shrines of **Vasupur**, **Vayupur**, **Nagpur** and **Agnipur** are named after the elements earth, wind, water and fire respectively and are distributed around the summit of the Swayambhu hill.

The **Vasupur shrine** appears first when continuing the clockwise tour from Anantapur. The shrine is dedicated to the element earth and the goddess of abundance. A small brick building houses the main shrine which contains numerous deities.



Anantapur





Agnipur Shrine

Continuing clockwise, the **Vayupur shrine** is enclosed between a series of smaller chaityas. This boulder, sheltered by a brick pavilion to the south of the stupa, represents the element wind. Worshippers may go inside and perform rituals or make offerings to the spirit of the wind, or Vayu.

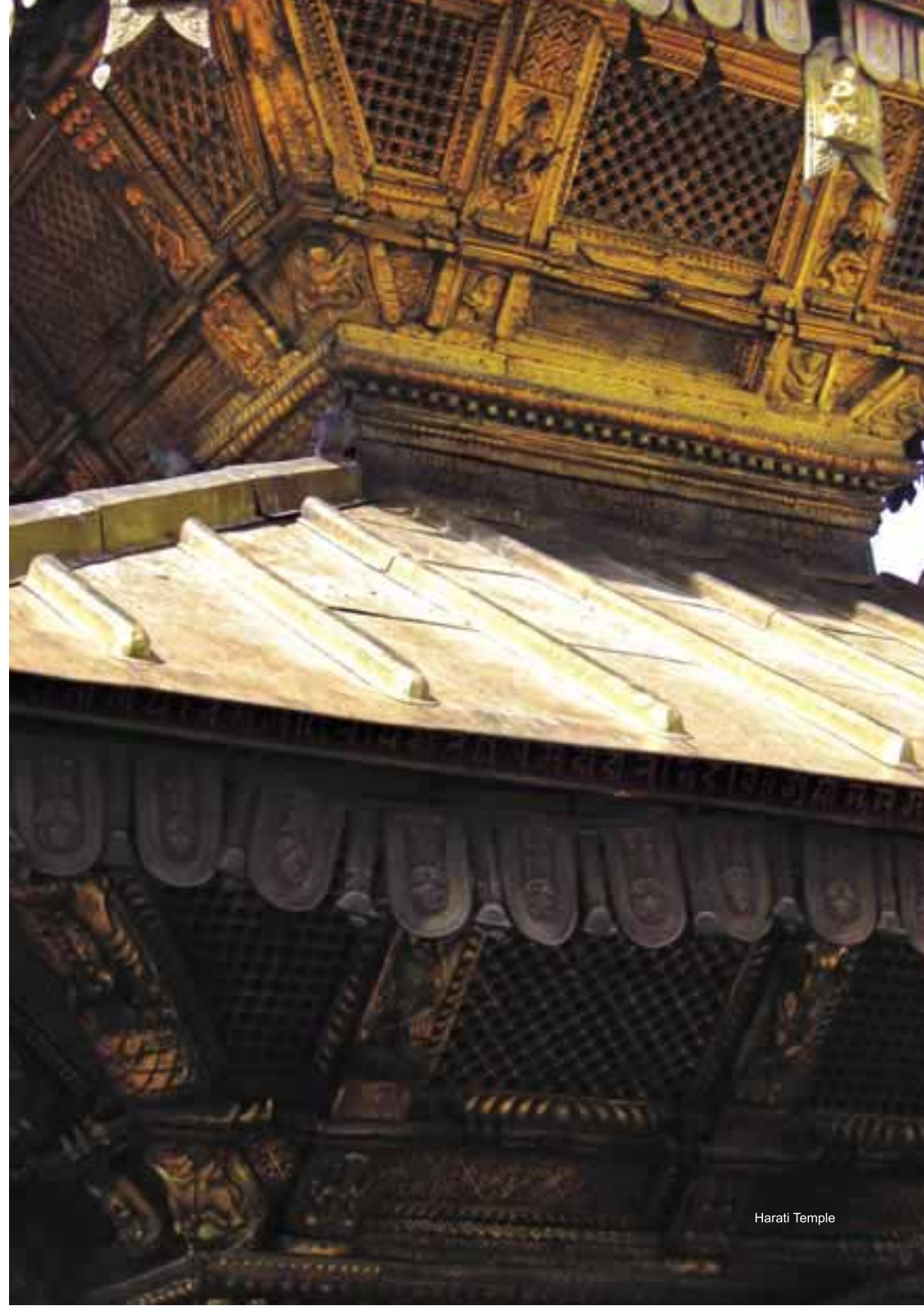
The **Nagpur shrine** lies just north of the stupa and represents the element water. The sunken temple, which looks like a small pond, is dedicated to the mythological Nagas (see page 6), who saved the Valley from drought.

**Agnipur**, the shrine dedicated to the element fire, is located further away from the stupa on the north-western corner of the summit. It is nothing more than a stone, coloured with lime and three black eyes representing sun, moon and fire. The stone does not have an enclosure around it and represents Agni, the fire spirit.

Continuing clockwise from the Vayupur shrine, one reaches a complex of temples. Facing the stupa and in particular the **Amithaba shrine**, sits a beautiful copper peacock. The peacock is the mount of Amithaba, the Buddha of the West (one of the Pancha Buddhas). On either side of the peacock statue, images of the river goddesses Ganga and Jamuna guard a symbolic eternal flame in the shrine below.

Towards the back of the peacock shrine is the **Deva Dharma Mahavihar**. This is one of the oldest Lamaistic (Tibetan Buddhist) institutions on the Swayambhu hill. The ground floor is a public sattal or open rest house, which is used by people waiting for their turn at the Harati temple. The main Buddhist monastery, however, is on the first floor. It was established in 1780 as a Bhutanese monastery of the Kagyupa lineage known as **Drukpa Kagyupa**.

The structure that can be seen today dates back to the Rana period (early 20th century). Images of Shakyamuni Buddha, Shobdu Rinpoche, Padmasambhava, Naropa, Milarepa, Marpa and others are displayed on the walls and worshipped by the lamas who live in the monastery.



Harati Temple



The twin-roofed pagoda style **Harati Ajima Temple** is located on the western side of the stupa. As everywhere in the Kathmandu Valley, also in Swayambhu the line between Buddhism and Hinduism is thin and next to one of the main Buddhist stupas a Hindu temple can be seen dedicated to Harati or Ajima, the Newari mother goddess of smallpox.

The temple is adorned with wood carvings and gilded roofs. Above the windows are metal plates and above these are the images of **Garuda** (mythical man-bird figure, the mount of Vishnu) and **Cheppa**.

The **Cheppa** is depicted as a monster biting a snake and proudly occupies its place near the deities. When Manjushri drained the lake, he commanded that all creatures evacuate. One by one they obeyed until all were gone bar

one. Manjushri could still see a giant monster hiding under the surface of the water. Maddened by this unexpected insubordination, the Bodhisattva declared that if the creature would not come out on its own, he would be dragged out by force.

The unfortunate monster was painfully conscious of his grotesque appearance and agreed to leave the water only after Manjushri promised to keep his eyes closed. After being assured that he could leave the lake unobserved Cheppa began to emerge from the depths. However, Manjushri was completely overcome by curiosity, and opened his eyes. Cheppa quickly dived back into the water and swore never again to leave its concealing depths. Manjushri was embarrassed that he had broken his promise and proposed a compromise. Although he had seen the Cheppa's head and torso, he swore

### Kagyupa

Tibetan Buddhism is also called Lamaism, after the monks or lamas. This indicates the important place of the monastic world in the religious concept. Today, there are four major orders in Tibetan Buddhism: Nyingmapa, Kagyupa, Sakyapa and Gelugpa, each with a number of sub-sects:

The Kagyupa school, to which both monasteries on top of the Swayambhu hillock belong, arose out of the so-called Old School, Nyingmapa. The origins of the Nyingmapa order can be traced back to Padmasambhava, the Indian Saint who introduced Buddhism in Tibet in the 8th and 9th centuries. In contrast to the other major sects, Nyingmapa never reached major centralized power, and the prospered mostly in rural villages, where it became strongly linked with older shamanistic traditions.

During the resurgence of Buddhist influence in the 11th century in Tibet, many scholars from the Nyingmapa order went to study in India, which had a revitalizing effect for the Nyingmapa order itself, but which resulted also in the creation of a number of sub-sects. One of these scholars was the famous poet Milarepa (1040-1123), a disciple of Marpa (1012-1093), who became the founder of the main Nyingmapa sub-sect: the **Kagyupa order**. Although much more mainstream, the original shamanistic background did not completely disappear and Kagyupa monasteries became important centres for synthesising the clerical and shamanistic orientations of Tibetan buddhism.



Harati Temple





### Harati Ma

Sometimes referred to as 'Ajima' or Abhirati, and worshipped by Buddhists and Hindus alike, Harati Ma is considered a protector against disease, especially small pox, and other evil spirits.

According to the legend Abhirati or Harati Ma gave birth to five hundred children. She was particularly fond of the youngest son. Unfortunately, Abhirati had a habit of eating children, which earned her the name of 'Harati', or 'Stealer of Children'. She did not eat her own offspring but grew very fond of the children of the settlement of Rajagriha.

As time past the children of Rajagriha disappeared at an ever faster rate and the people were overwrought. They approached Buddha and requested him to end their misery. Buddha decided to kidnap Priyankara, Abhirati's favourite son in order to teach her a lesson. The day that Abhirati returned home and could not find her son, she grew deeply concerned and searched the globe to find him. Finally the Stealer of Children approached Buddha and asked for her favourite son to be returned. The Buddha asked her why she was concerned when only one of her children was missing. Abhirati realized her mistakes and promised never again to eat human flesh.

The people of Nepal worship Harati Ma and ask her to protect their children from disease. In sculptured images five children always accompany Harati Ma. They represent her original five hundred offspring, and despite her child-eating past she has become a symbol of Motherhood.



never to look at the lower half of his body, and allowed the wronged creature to occupy a significant corner of the temples. Since then Cheppa has resided alongside deities, always half-hidden.

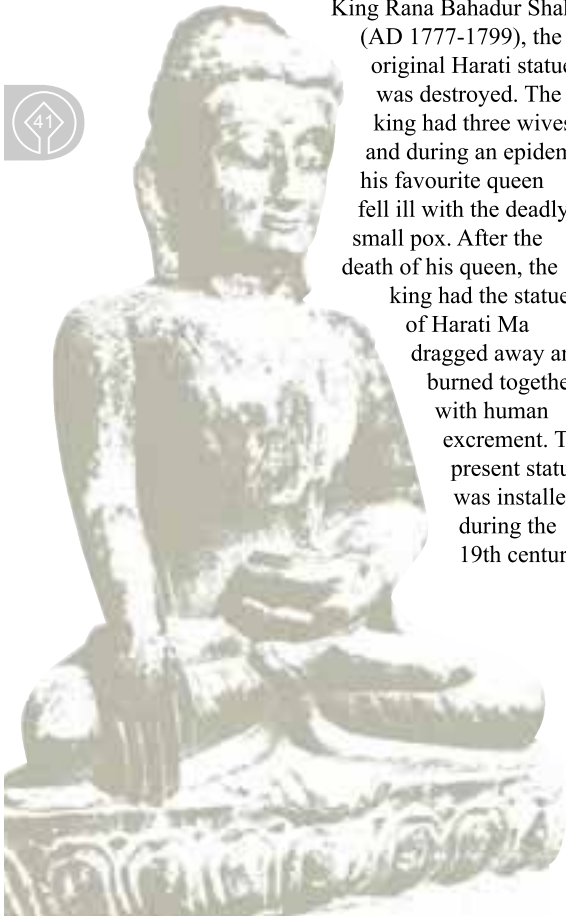
The Harati Ma temple is home to a stone **statue of Harati** with five children. It is carved from shaligram stone and was installed in the 1800s. Shaligram is a black fossil stone which in Nepal is found in the Kali Ghandaki river in Mustang district. The stones are considered representations of Lord Vishnu.

During the reign of the erratic King Rana Bahadur Shah (AD 1777-1799), the original Harati statue was destroyed. The king had three wives and during an epidemic his favourite queen fell ill with the deadly small pox. After the death of his queen, the king had the statue of Harati Ma dragged away and burned together with human excrement. The present statue was installed during the 19th century.

People continue to flock to the Harati Temple to light butter lamps and make offerings of eggs, rice grains, incense, liquor and sweets. It is believed that if the goddess is pleased with the offerings she will protect the donor's children from disease. Invalid children are brought to the temple and elaborate rituals are performed in order to cure them. The statue is often coated with red tika powder and strung with garlands of flowers, particularly on Tuesdays and Saturdays.

The Goddess must be kept happy if an epidemic is to be averted and a community of caretakers ensures that the necessary rituals are performed for this purpose. The Buddhacharya, also known as the palo, is one such group (mainly composed of priests), who perform the rituals and puja (worship) at Swayambhu Manjushri (see page 47) and the Harati Temple. Although they have some things in common with the Bajracharyas of Kathmandu, the Buddhacharyas only perform rituals such as reading from the sacred texts or scriptures and performing important pujas for the pilgrims at Harati. They strictly avoid the death rituals, which are handled by the Bajracharyas. The Buddhacharyas claim descent from the four legendary brothers who are said to be the sons of either Manjushri or Shantikar Acharya.

Continuing clockwise around the stupa from the Harati Temple a number of small curio shops and two storied houses line the path. Adjacent to these and in front of the Pratappur temple is the **Karmaraja Mahavihar**, the largest monastery around the stupa.





### Caretakers of Swayambhu

The community of Swayambhu is divided into four families who worship the same clan deity. An elder, who is known as the Thakali or Munayah, heads the community. The heads of the four families accompany the Thakali at special occasions and the position is passed on on the basis of seniority.

Other duties are divided among the four families based on a cyclical system. There are two types of duty: the dyahpalo and the dapalo. Each week a different family plays the part of the dyahpalo and the benefits of the dapalo role are passed on each year. The caretakers are entitled to the offerings made to the following deities: the Pancha Buddhas, the Shaktis (mother goddesses), Manjushri and Harati. Under normal circumstances the dapalo receives the major share of the offerings made during the rituals but occasionally the profits have to be shared with the other families.

During the Katipunhi (full-moon around October), the dapalo receives the offerings made to the Amitabha and the offerings made to the remaining 4 Pancha Buddhas are divided among the four families. On the fifth day of lunar Magha Sri Panchami is celebrated as the Spring festival. On this day, people worship Manjushri and Saraswati and the dyahpalo is entitled to the offerings made until 10 a.m. and after 5 p.m. The dapalo receives all the offerings made during the time frame of 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. The dapalo also has to perform special pujas during Sakimapunhi (full-moon around November) or Sipunhi (full-moon around February) when he accompanies the elder in the rituals performed at Shantipur.

With the passage of time the number of families has increased and this has led to inevitable complications. The once simple system has become very complex and these days families only become dyahpalo after three years and dapalo after about 180 years.

The Karmaraja Mahavihar was founded in 1954. The monastery belongs to the Kagyupa lineage, which is one of the four main monastic schools of Tibetan Buddhism.

The Karmaraja Mahavihar monastery houses around fifty monks. The main door opens onto a dukhang or assembly hall. Butter lamps and incense sticks are lit every day. The smoke from incense sticks, ever climbing towards the ceiling and the pungent scent adds a touch of mysticism to the atmosphere.

There is a prayer hall behind the entrance hall, which has images of Shakyamuni Buddha, the famous poet Milarepa, Situ Rinpoche 6th and Vajrasattva.

Slightly aside from the main stupa circuit, behind the Agnipur shrine, stands the **Shantipur** temple. The tantric sage Shantikar Acharya is still believed to be living here. The Shantipur is a plain building shrouded in legends which can be reached by walking down flights of steps at the north of the hill top.

It was originally called Akashpur but was later renamed after the enigmatic tantric. The temple is dedicated to the sky, but is much more famous for the link with its illustrious founder.

Shantipur's door is guarded by fierce guardian statues. The building itself houses a population of rats, images of deities and a locked door. Behind this door, people believe that Shantikar Acharya still meditates by a magical pool and cave, which leads all the way to Tibet. This inner sanctum is only



Karmaraja Mahavihar

accessible for Buddhist tantric priests, who perform a ceremony twice a month. The walls of the temple hall are decorated with frescoes depicting scenes from the Swayambhu purana, the ancient texts telling mythological stories about the founding of the stupa.



Shantipur









## MANJUSHRI HILL

The **Manjushri chaitya**, situated on the western peak just above the car park, was allegedly built by Shantikar Acharya in memory of the Bodhisattva Manjushri, who is considered responsible for draining the Kathamandu Valley lake, thus rendering it suitable for human occupation. The chaitya is surrounded by prayer wheels and once a year hosts a festival dedicated to **Saraswati**, the goddess of learning, music and arts. She is popular with both Hindus and Buddhists (Buddhists consider her the consort of Manjushri).

On the northern slopes of the Swayambhu hill, deep in the woods, is the **Ananda Kuti Vihar**, a Theravada Buddhist monastery that was established in 1943.



Manjushri Shrine







# PRAYER WHEELS AND OM MANI PADME HUM

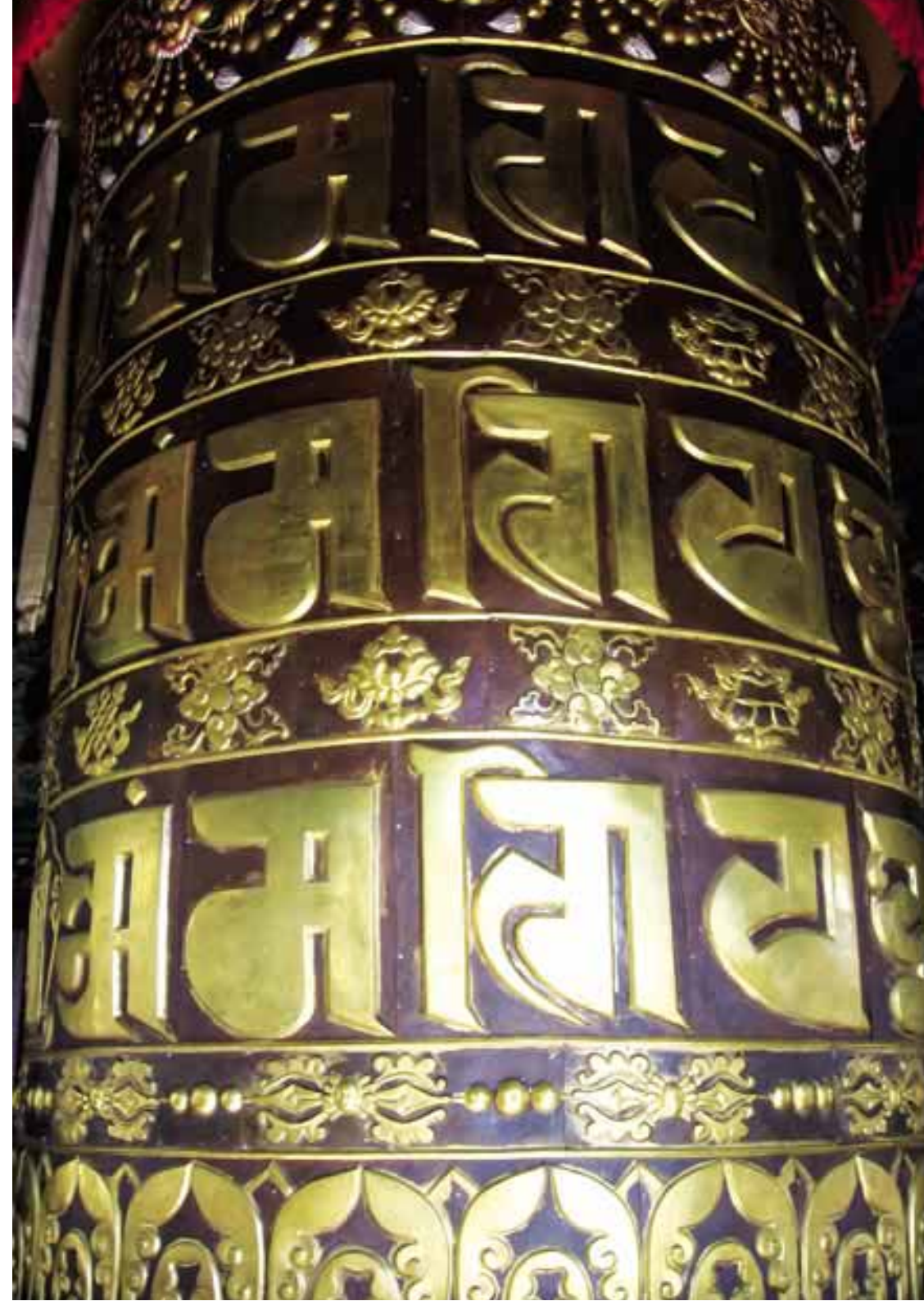
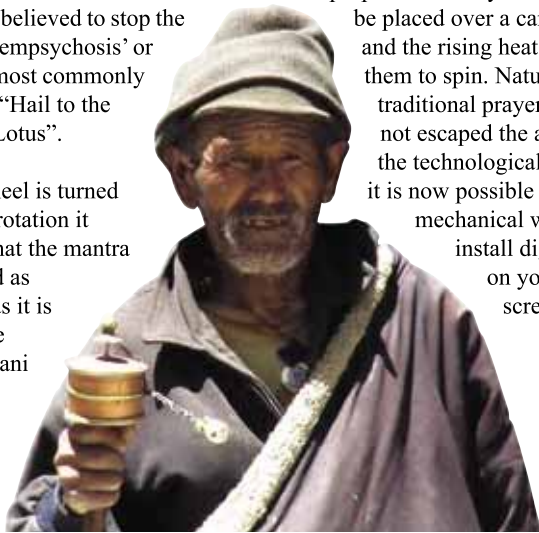
The six syllabled mystic sentence “Om Mani Padme Hum” is the mantra of Avalokitesvara (Chenrezig in Tibetan) and is revolved inside prayer wheels or Mani. The wheels are devices for spreading spiritual blessings and well being. The mantra is printed as many times as possible on the amount of rice paper that fills the inside of the wheel. The paper is wound round an axle and sealed into the protective cylinder. In some of the larger prayer wheels it is printed over a million times. In the more decorative wheels the mantra is often also carved on the outside.

Tibetan Buddhists believe that saying this mantra out loud or silently to oneself invokes the powerful benevolent attention and blessings of Avalokiteshvara, the embodiment of compassion. The mere utterance of the mantra is believed to stop the cycle of ‘metempsychosis’ or rebirth. It is most commonly translated as “Hail to the jewel in the Lotus”.

When the wheel is turned through one rotation it symbolises that the mantra has been read as many times as it is written inside the wheel. Mani

wheels are always spun clockwise. This matches the required direction of circumambulation and follows the direction of the sun. Interestingly, practitioners of Bon, the pre-Buddhist spiritual tradition of Tibet, spin their prayer wheels counter-clockwise, the same direction they use in circumambulation.

There are a number of prayer wheel types, the most common being the hand-held version usually with a wooden handle, that is used on pilgrimages and during private prayer. Slightly larger wheels are mounted in rows leading to shrines or on well-trodden paths used to circumambulate sacred areas such as around the stupas at Swayambhu and Bauddhanath. The wheels can also be placed in strategic positions so that wind, or water, will propel them. Very small wheels can be placed over a candle flame and the rising heat will cause them to spin. Naturally the traditional prayer wheels have not escaped the advances of the technological world and it is now possible to purchase mechanical wheels or to install digital versions on your computer screen.





# FESTIVALS

by Shanti Mishra

Nepal is known to foreigners as a land of fascinating festivals, and rightly so as the Nepalese celebrate more festivals than there are days in a year. They are celebrated according to the lunar calendar and therefore do not occur on the same date from year to year and every full moon day (the 15th day of the lunar month) has special significance. The lifestyle of the Nepalese people is uniquely interwoven with religious culture and rituals and entertainment is provided by the numerous festivals. They are not merely spectacles but a celebration of the glorious cultural heritage. Festivals unite people of diverse cultural backgrounds and faiths into one nation. Besides Gods and Goddesses, the worshipping during some festivals is in honour of the earth, sun, moon, parents, brothers, cows, snakes, dogs, rivers, plants, tools, weapons - practically everything!







Halimuniwboyagu

Some festivals such as Dasain and Tihar are celebrated throughout the country. Some are celebrated only in the cities. These include Indra Jatra in Kathmandu, Rato Machhendranath Jatra in Patan and Bisket Jatra in Bhaktapur. Some are celebrated only in one village; Hari Shankar Jatra in Pharping, Adinath Jatra in Chobhar and Maha-Laxmi Jatra in Thankot. The festivals which are centered on Swayambhu are as follows:

Name	Month of Celebration
Buddha Jayanti	Baisakh (April/May)
Pulukhuigu	Asar (June/July)
Gunla	Shrawan-Bhadra (Jul/Aug/Sep)
Olachonegu	Asoj (Sep/Oct)
Halimuniwboyagu	Kartik (Oct/Nov)
Shri Panchami	Magha (Jan/Feb)

#### **Buddha Jayanti**

(Baisakh/April-May)

Buddha Jayanti is celebrated on the full moon of Baisakh to commemorate three major events in Buddha's life: his birth, enlightenment and his passing into Nirvana (death). On this occasion, the Buddhist shrines and stupas are beautifully decorated with prayer flags and become the focal point for

people to present offerings to Buddha. Special activities are organized at Swayambhu. From dawn to dusk, the devotees gather around the stupa and the remains of Buddha are displayed in the Anandakuti Mahavihar for devotees to see. Valuable thangkas (religious painted scrolls) and different images of Buddha are displayed all day around the Stupa. Monks parade with horns and symbols performing rituals and butter lamps and electric bulbs blaze through the night – as it is a night of fasting and chanting.

#### **Pulukhuigu**

(Asar/June-July)

There are many festivals held in Swayambhu and some of them are for the preservation and maintenance of the stupa. Pulukhuigu festival occurs on Bhalabhala astami day, seven days before the waning moon of Asar.

The golden parts of the stupa are covered with vakari (bamboo mats) by members of the Maharjan Guthi so that the coming monsoon will not damage them. The vakari are later removed on the full moon day of Asoj.

#### **Gunla**

(Shrawan-Bhadra/July-September)

Gunla is the holy month for Newar Buddhists, dedicated to Buddha to commemorate the auspicious 'rains retreat'. This was when Buddha led his disciples into meditation to preach the essence of his philosophy. During the Gunla the Newar Buddhists spend their morning time in prayer and worship. They visit shrines in different localities making the main stop in Swayambhu where the key Gunla activities take place. They come in groups in the early morning playing traditional







'Gunla Baja' instruments through the city: thumping Dhancha, and Paschhima (drums), clanging symbols and blowing flutes with great devotion. They climb 365 steps to reach the stupa of Swayambhu and spin the hundreds of metal prayer wheels set in its base for World Peace – Om Mani Padme Hum. The stupa is illuminated every night and on the final day, devotees come to spend it enjoying feasts with their relatives and friends.

### **Olachonegu**

(Asoj/September-October)  
Olachonegu starts on Kojagrata Purnima, the full moon day of Asoj. On this occasion, the Maharjans (members of the farmer caste of the Kathmandu Valley) come to Swayambhu early in the morning and spend three days performing different rituals to receive blessings to improve their professional skills and prosperity. According to their

religious rites they are not supposed to eat salt and have to be pure vegetarians. They have to comply with these terms for three years, spending three days a year at the stupa.

### **Halimunibwoyagu**

(Kartik - October/November)  
This festival is held on Kartik Purnima (the full moon day of Kartik). Shakyas and Bajracharyas from the Buddhist community in Patan come to Swayambhu to perform special rituals and draw beautiful pictures of Kalash (symbolic vessel) and Khadga (swords) using wheat grains, corn, black soyabeans etc. Many devotees of all creeds and ages come to see this artistic display.

### **Shri Panchami**

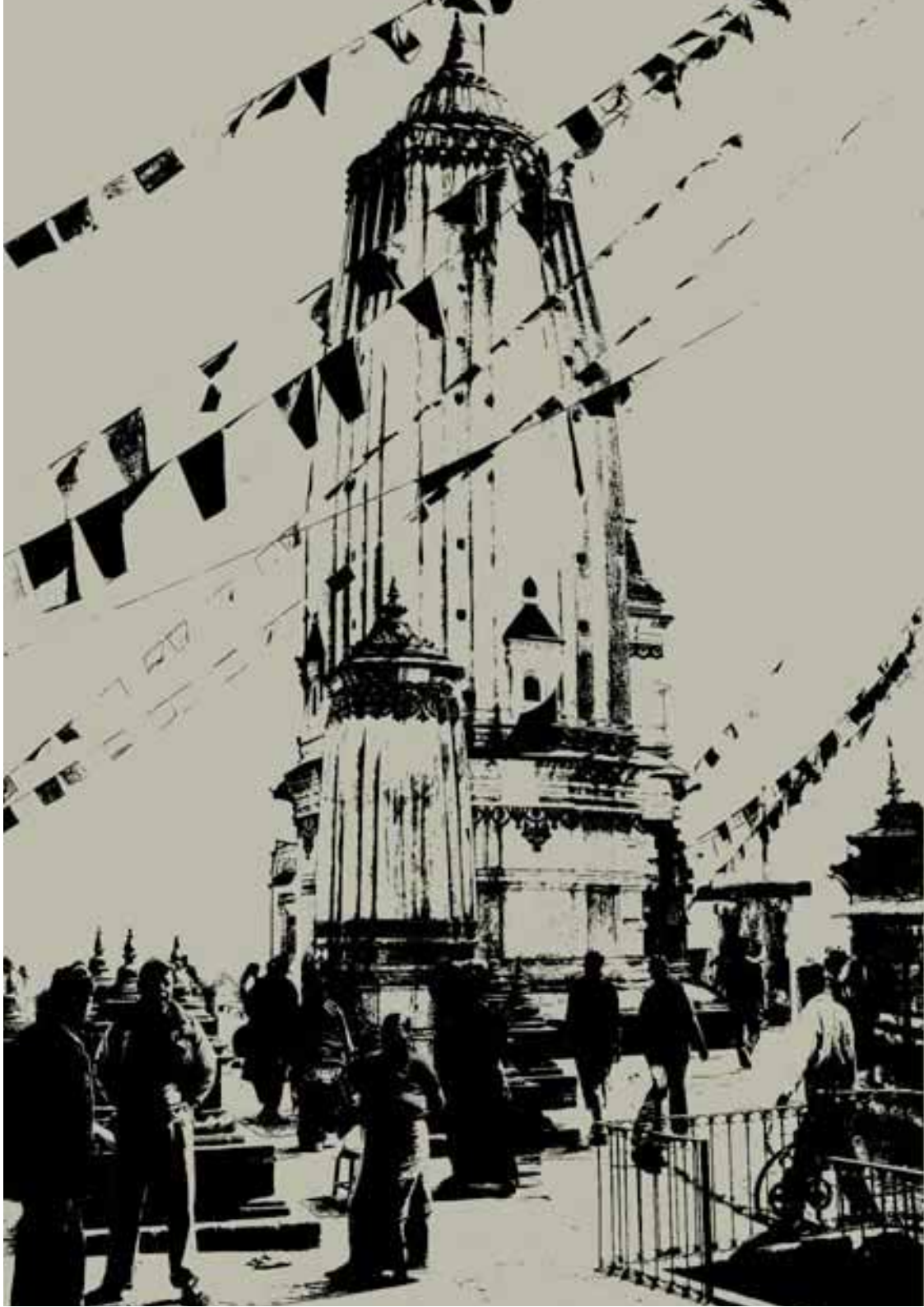
(Magha/January-February)  
Shri Panchami is celebrated in honour of Saraswati, the goddess of learning and wisdom who is one of the few great goddesses of the Hindu religion and is still widely worshipped by both Hindus and Buddhists. It is always observed on Panchami – the fifth day of the waxing moon in the month of Magh. Devotees of Saraswati keep themselves busy from the morning worshipping learning materials such as books, pens and inkpots, and visiting Saraswati temples. There are many temples dedicated to her in the Kathmandu Valley and one of them is in Swayambhu. On the third day the temple is decorated to welcome devotees who come in their thousands to offer puja and to get blessings. This festival is also known as Basanta Panchami which marks the end of winter and the advent of spring.











## PRATAPPUR RESTORATION

by the Department of Archaeology  
and Manindra Shrestha

In August 2003 a fire broke out inside Pratappur and fire-fighters took more than 12 hours to bring it under control. By then, the interior of the temple was completely destroyed.

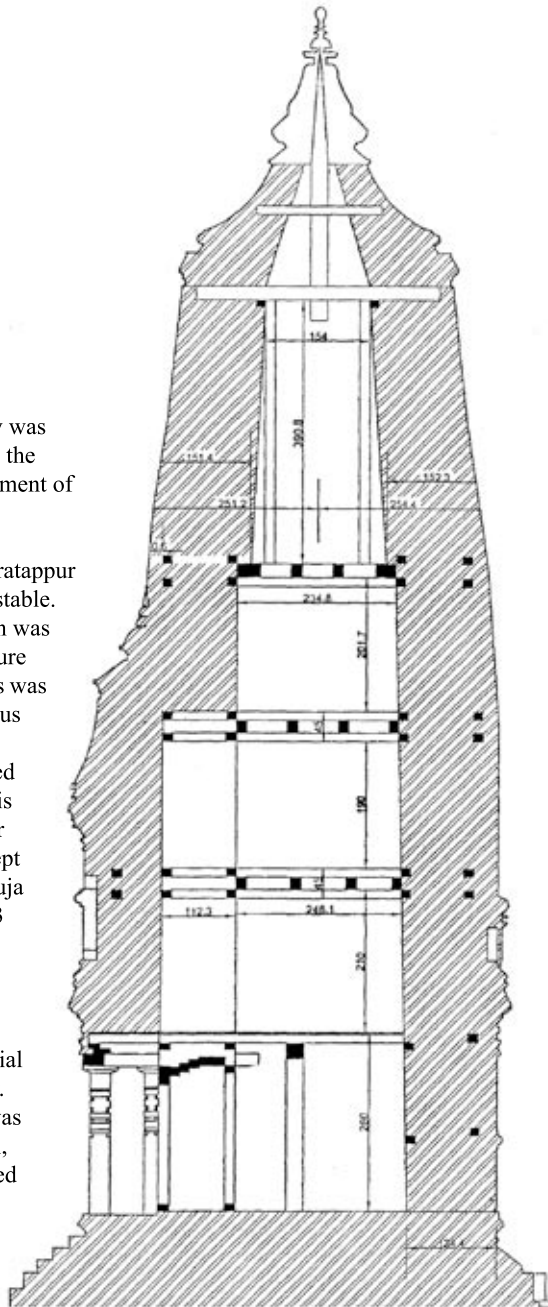
The reason behind the outbreak of fire in the temple that was rarely entered was not immediately clear. Oil lamps lit around the premises may be the explanation but a mysterious fact emerged after the incident. The local newspapers quoted the priest of the temple as saying that a man dressed in white vanished immediately after informing him about the outbreak of the fire.



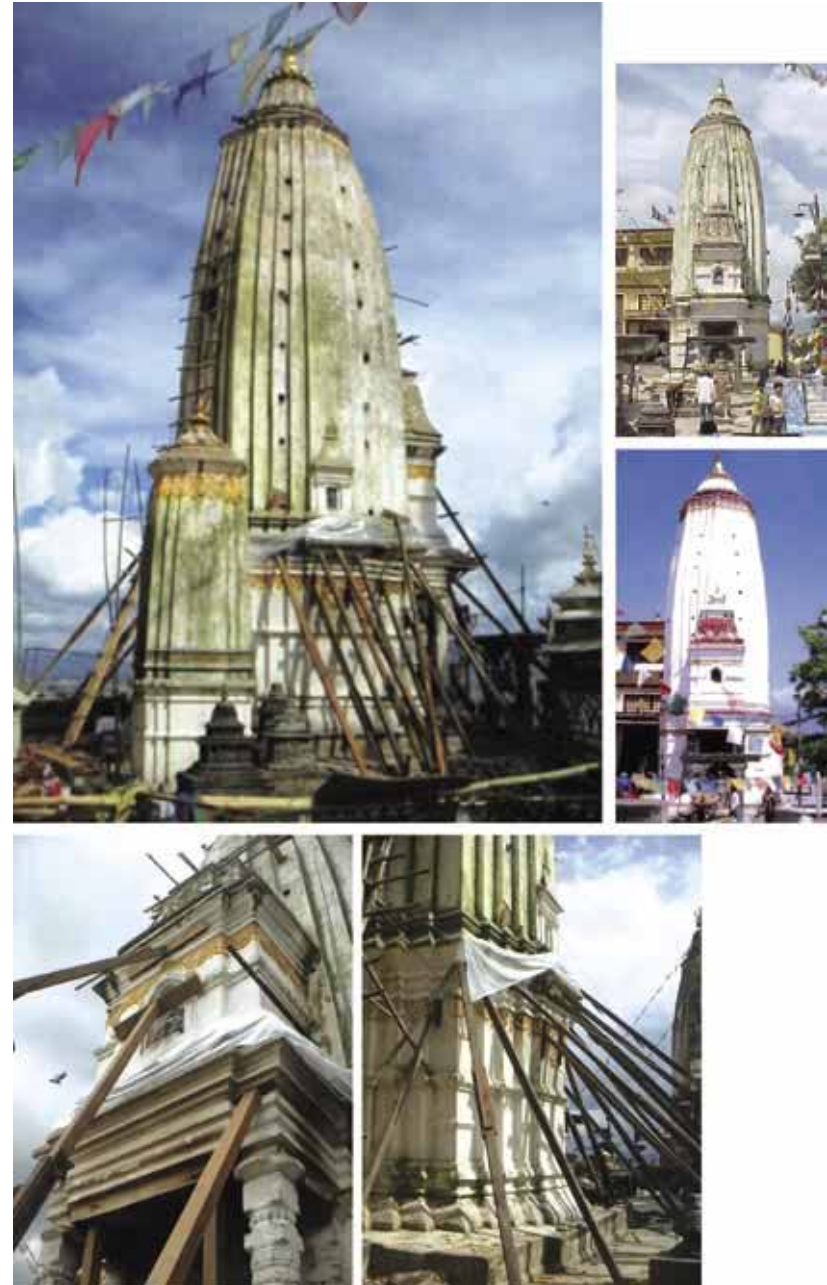
The Pratappur you see today was completely reconstructed by the Nepal Government's Department of Archaeology.

After the ominous fire the Pratappur tower became extremely unstable. All necessary documentation was done as an emergency measure and the community of priests was busy calculating an auspicious date for ksyama puja, an apologetic worship performed before any restoration work is commenced, when the tower suddenly collapsed on 23 Sept 2003. The date of ksyama puja was scheduled 1-5 Dec 2003 and was duly performed.

Restoration work was completed to the original plan, using traditional material and construction technology. After the restoration work was done, a re-establishing ritual, jiba nias puja, was performed in April 2005.

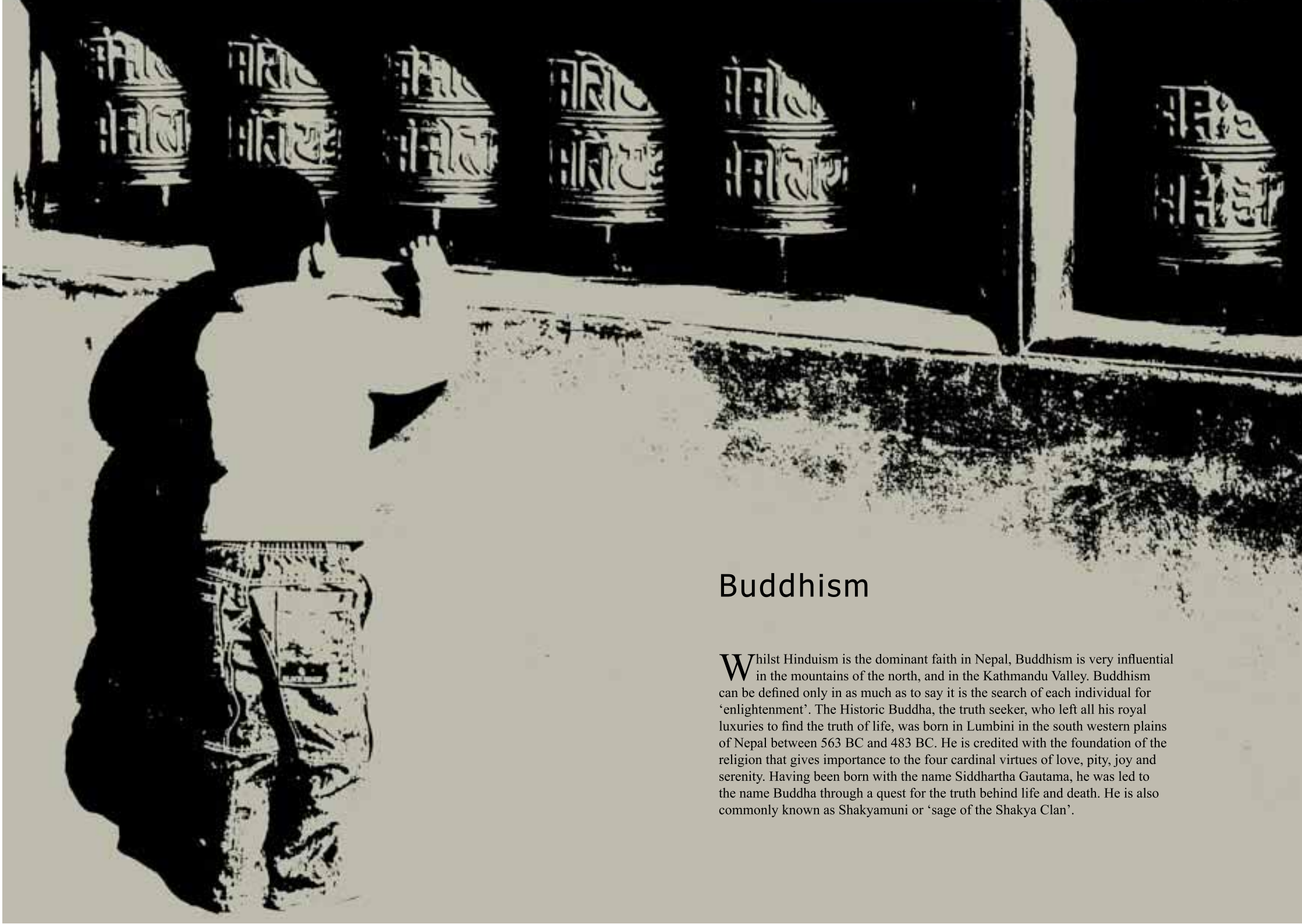


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## Buddhism

Whilst Hinduism is the dominant faith in Nepal, Buddhism is very influential in the mountains of the north, and in the Kathmandu Valley. Buddhism can be defined only in as much as to say it is the search of each individual for 'enlightenment'. The Historic Buddha, the truth seeker, who left all his royal luxuries to find the truth of life, was born in Lumbini in the south western plains of Nepal between 563 BC and 483 BC. He is credited with the foundation of the religion that gives importance to the four cardinal virtues of love, pity, joy and serenity. Having been born with the name Siddhartha Gautama, he was led to the name Buddha through a quest for the truth behind life and death. He is also commonly known as Shakyamuni or 'sage of the Shakya Clan'.



Buddhism is based on the Teachings (**Dharma**) of the Buddha.

The historic Buddha, **Siddhartha Gautama** was born in **Lumbini**, southern Nepal around 500 BC. He was born as a prince and later left the royal life in search of enlightenment. In this way he discovered the so-called “middle path” or method of moderation to reach **nirvana** or heaven.

The basic belief is that life on earth is only a path towards the perfection of the self. In order to reach enlightenment and thus nirvana, Buddhism preaches the liberating force created through the cooperation of body and mind (practices related to meditation). The ultimate goal is to reach complete **detachment**.

Buddhists have a cyclic concept of time, which includes the belief in **reincarnation**. One has to go through a series of rebirths until nirvana is reached, where one is free from desire and suffering. The path that takes you through the different lives and rebirths is referred to as **karma**. Karma is not a fatalistic principle, but it refers to the actions which one undertakes during a lifetime and which will be reflected in the next life.

Siddhartha Gautama is referred to as the “**Historic Buddha**” or the Present Buddha as there is also a **Past Buddha** and a **Future Buddha**. The latter is also referred to as Maitreya or Jampa. It is believed that he will come to earth in about 1000 years from now, once the dharma has reached a very low level and people require guidance.

The historic Buddha himself never wrote down his principles. All of this was done by later generations, leading to numerous discussions among his followers on the exact interpretations of the teaching. This debate resulted in the creation of two major schools of Buddhism: Mahayana and Theravada.

**Theravada**, or the ‘Doctrine of the Elders’, is also referred to as Hinayana. This is the strictest, most conservative and most scholastic form of Buddhism, which adheres very closely to the original teachings. It is believed that the search for nirvana is an individual pursuit. This is the form of Buddhism found in South-East Asia.

**Mahayana** took Buddhism in a new direction, which was less strict and much more focussed on compassion. The Mahayana tradition arose in southern India and Sri Lanka and was distributed to the Himalayan region (including Nepal and Tibet) and East Asia. One of its main principles is that the combined beliefs of all the followers will eventually result in salvation for all.

In the Himalayan region, a very specific type of Buddhism developed out of the original Mahayana tradition: **Vajrayana** or Tantric Buddhism. The Vajrayana School emerged around 600AD and is based on more esoteric traditions. Tantric Buddhists use certain techniques to attain enlightenment such as deep meditation and recitation of mantras. One of these mantras is ‘**Om Mani Padme Hum**’, also called the mantra of Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion.

Buddhism in the Himalayan region, and especially in Tibet, was introduced by **Padmasambhava** or Guru Rinpoche in the 7th century. Padmasambhava is

a historic figure, whose life has over time become part of myth and legend. As a historic figure, he was an Indian Saint called upon by the king of Tibet, Songstan Gambo, to assist in the construction of Tibet’s first monastery (Samye, south of Lhasa) and to spread the Buddhist teachings throughout the Tibetan kingdom. Padmasambhava also ensured the translation of the main texts from Sanskrit into Tibetan.

In the Tibetan region, Buddhism mingled with the older Bon faith as well as with local shamanistic traditions. This way, the Vajrayana school of Buddhism is much more closely linked to ancient spiritual and naturalistic practices and presents a wide range of deities, both benign and wrathful.

The Vajrayana School is sometimes referred to as **Lamaism**. This much more archaic name has become rare, but indicates the importance of the monastic communities (monk = lama) in Tibetan Buddhism.

Within Vajrayana Buddhism, there are four major monastic schools: **Nyingmapa**, **Kagyupa**, **Gelugpa** and **Sakyapa**. (see page 37). All are represented in present day Nepal.

Besides images of the Past, Present and Future Buddha, there are a number of other deities and saints which are often depicted and venerated.





The **Pancha Buddhas**: In Buddhist philosophy the world is made up of 5 cosmic elements: rupa, samjana, vedana, sanskara and vijnana. In the Vajrayana tradition, these elements are represented by the Pancha (five) Buddhas: Amitabha, Akshobhya, Vairochana, Amoghasiddhi and Ratnasambhava. They are also referred to as the Dhyani Buddhas or the 5 Conquerors and are always represented sitting on a lotus with half-closed eyes and their legs crossed, in deep meditation.

In Nepal, there is an additional 6th Buddha: Vajrasattva. He is the summation of the other Pancha Buddhas and is also referred to as Adi Buddha or Swayambhu. He is represented carrying a vajra or thunderbolt in his right hand and a bell in his left.

A **Bodhisattva** is someone who has achieved enlightenment and decides to remain part of the cycle of rebirths in order to end the suffering of all sentient beings. 'Bodhi' means enlightenment and 'Sattva' means essence or being. While Buddhas have freed themselves from the life of suffering and the cycle of rebirths to attain nirvana, the Bodhisattvas have chosen to remain in this world to help others free themselves from worldly attachments and desires.

A group of three Bodhisattvas is often referred to as the Three Protectors, being **Manjushri** (Wisdom), **Avalokiteshvara** (Compassion) and

**Vajrapani** (Power). They are often accompanied by **Tara**, the female Bodhisattva of Wisdom.

In earlier times Buddhist art used symbols for representing the key-elements of the religion. During Buddha's lifetime and until 100AD, there was no physical representation of the Buddha. In early Buddhism symbols were used to indicate the main events of Buddha's life: lotus – birth, bodhi tree – awakening, dharma wheel – delivery of the first sermon, stupa – nirvana.

# BUDDHISM IN NEPAL: MONASTERIES IN THE NEPAL MANDALA

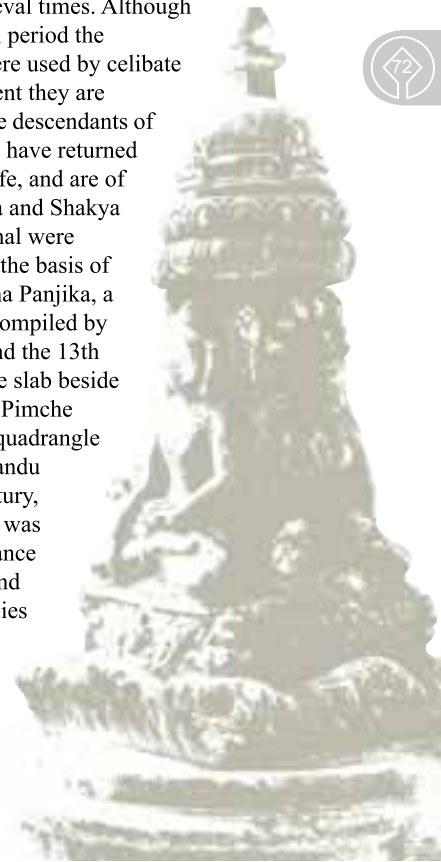
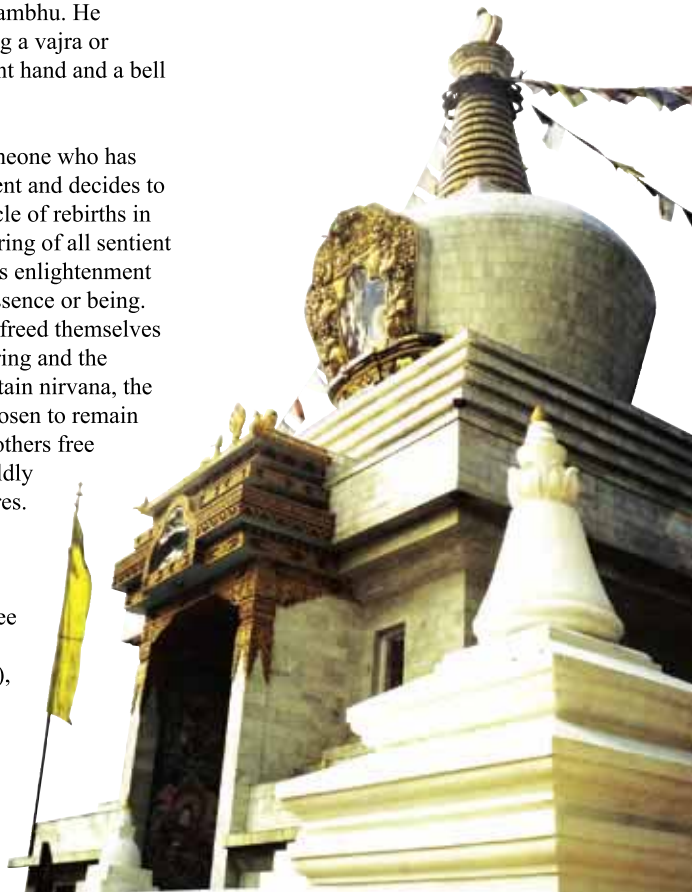
by Manik Shakya

The Kathmandu Valley is known as Nepal Mandala. A mandala is a circle, a mystic diagram of varied form, and in ancient Indian usage signified an administrative unit or a country. From at least the 6th century AD, in conjunction with the word "Nepal", it signified to the Nepalese the Kathmandu Valley and surrounding territory.

The Valley itself measures about 24 km in length by 19 km in width and is surrounded by forested hills. The Nepal Mandala of the present day Kathmandu Valley is a living tradition of unique Buddhist Art and Architecture. It is also an aspect of intangible heritage that has developed in a definite geographical location and is shared by the majority of people in the Valley.

The People of Nepal have called the Kathmandu Valley 'Nepal Mandala' since the pre-Lichhavi era, and it is referred to as such in an inscription written during the reign of Jayadeva. The Nepal Mandala has significance for both Buddhists and Hindus and it is an important place from the point of view of vihar (monastery) Architecture.

There are a number of medieval Buddhist monuments in the form of monasteries or viharas- known locally as Bahal, in the Nepal Mandala. These monasteries are living proof of the flourishing of Buddhist architecture since the medieval times. Although in the medieval period the monasteries were used by celibate monks, at present they are inhabited by the descendants of the monks who have returned to a common life, and are of the Vajracharya and Shakya castes. The Bahal were constructed on the basis of the Krisamgraha Panjika, a Buddhist text compiled by Kuldatta around the 13th century. A stone slab beside the entrance to Pimche Bahal, a vihar quadrangle built in Kathmandu in the 16th century, specifies that it was built in accordance with the text, and manuscript copies still exist in Nepal.





In the geographical area covered by the Nepal Mandala, approximately 200 monasteries exist at present, some of which are in good condition such as Hiranya Varna Mahavihar, Rudravarna Mahavihar of Lalitpur, Gunakar Mahavihar of Kathmandu and the Thathu Bahi of Bhaktapur. The features of a Nepal Mandala Bahal are as follows:

### Ground floor

According to the Kriyasamgraha, the foundations of the quadrangular monasteries are permeated with the Vajra Dhatu Mandala, and special arrangements are devised for the gods. Before starting construction, the gods need to be worshipped. After completing the worship, construction can commence. According to a second Buddhist text, written in the Newari language, the quadrangle shape is the ideal from an architectural point of view. With the exception for the doorways in the front façade, the ground floor is totally sealed off from the outside world, and the open porticos face inwards overlooking the courtyards.

### Entrance

In the majority of the monasteries the entrance is at ground level, facing north-east, and the stone door is flanked by 2 stone lions. The stone beam of the entrance is called khalu in Newari. It is believed that anyone who crosses the khalu is instantly purified. Inside the entrance there are usually waiting places which were used for conducting interviews with visitors. Nowadays they are also used for chanting and Hymn recitation.

### Courtyard

The Monastery building usually rests on a low plinth-like base. The courtyard is sunken except for a narrow walkway around it, and the rooms are set around the courtyard. In the courtyard a chaitya is constructed. In addition other religious items like prayer wheels and incense burners are also located here.

### Chaitya

Chaitya are essential features of every monastery. Each monastic courtyard contains at least one chaitya in the center. Most are built of stone and they vary in size. They are often referred to as Ashoka Chaitya as there is a popular belief that they were erected by the emperor Ashoka who is said to have constructed 84,000 stupas containing Buddha's remains. Most of the monasteries also have one votive chaitya that was erected by members of the sangha or by lay people, in memory of the deceased and ancestors. In the tradition of the Buddha Shakyamuni, all chaityas represent the transcendental form and are thus the focus of public worship. It is believed that the establishment of chaitya brings merit.

### Mandala

Every monastery of the Nepal Mandala contains a mandala which is made of stone or repousse metalwork molded onto a stone base. The Mandala featured here is called Dharma Dhatu Mandala and is Tantric with the central figure of Manjughosa, a form of Manjushri, considered to be of the family of Vajrasattva.

### Agam (esoteric room)

The Agam is usually a separate attic room that is kept closed and locked. It may contain an image or symbol of a lineage deity, various other images and sacred objects. The highest Tantric deities like Chakra Sambar and Vajradevi are seated in the agam and only a few members of the sangha are permitted to enter. Vajrayani tantric rituals are performed in this room. It is believed that the Tantric tradition began in the Nepal Mandala in the 12th century, and has since become widespread, with Tantric images being established in every bahal.

### Torana or Tympanum

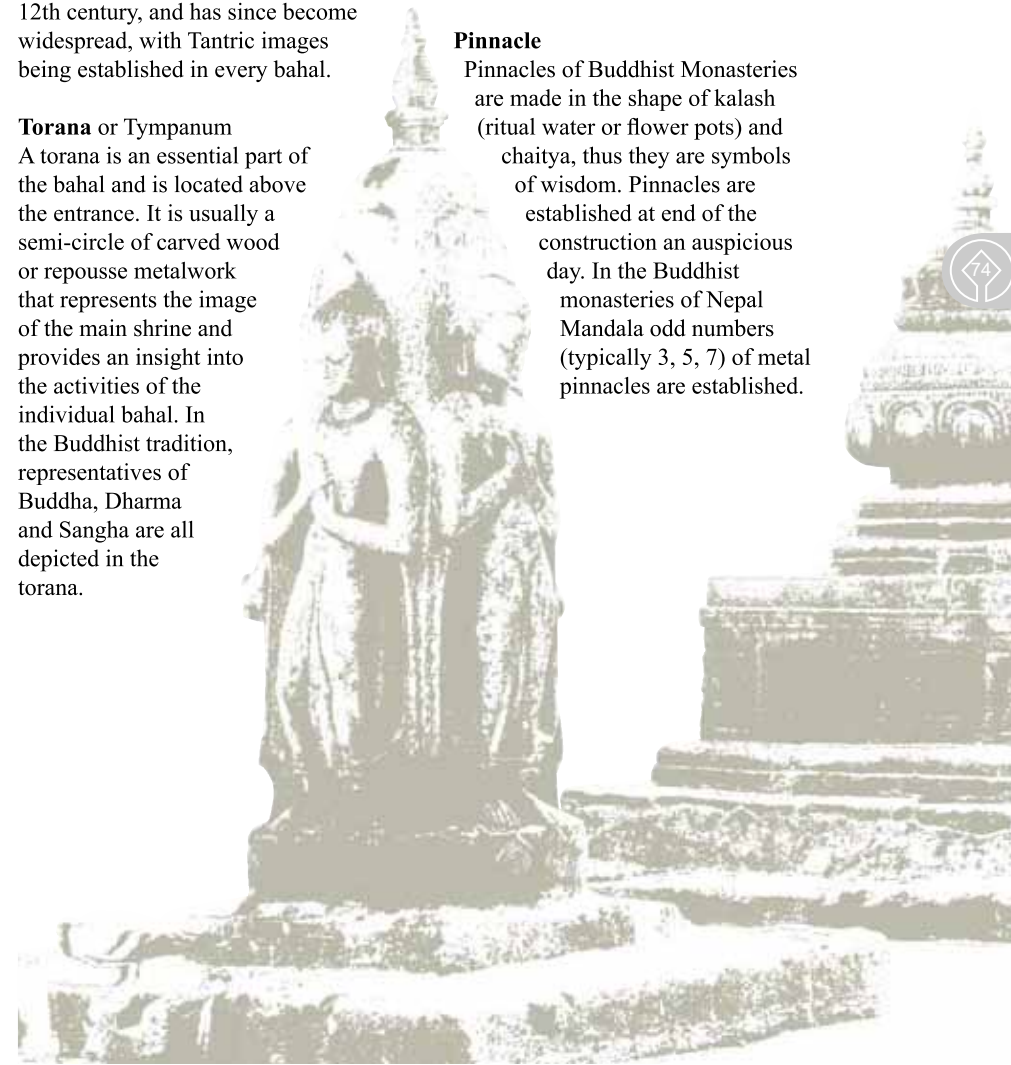
A torana is an essential part of the bahal and is located above the entrance. It is usually a semi-circle of carved wood or repousse metalwork that represents the image of the main shrine and provides an insight into the activities of the individual bahal. In the Buddhist tradition, representatives of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha are all depicted in the torana.

### Strut

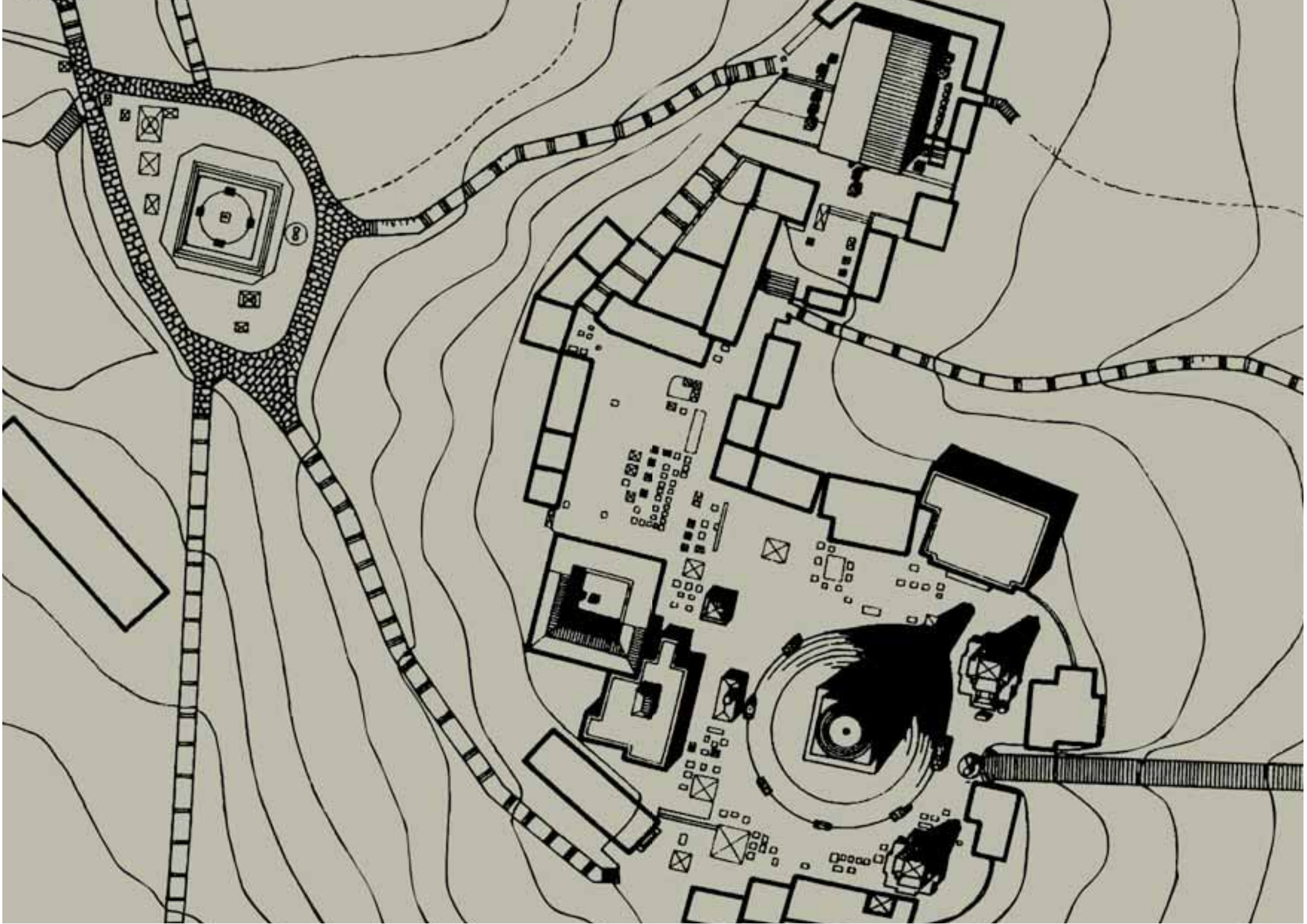
The roof, with its border of wood, clay and tiles and its wide projecting eaves, is very heavy. It is supported by carved wooden struts known as tudanl in Newari. They are set at a 45 degree angle and are braced between the roof, beams and brick cornice, or individually against slightly projected beam ends. In quadrangles, corner tudanls longer and larger than the others support the most extensive overhangs of the roofs.

### Pinnacle

Pinnacles of Buddhist Monasteries are made in the shape of kalash (ritual water or flower pots) and chaitya, thus they are symbols of wisdom. Pinnacles are established at end of the construction an auspicious day. In the Buddhist monasteries of Nepal Mandala odd numbers (typically 3, 5, 7) of metal pinnacles are established.









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